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IMMANUEL DI ROMI, A THIRTEENTH CENTURY HEBREW POET AND NOVELIST.

IN the present essay a short sketch will be given of the life and works of Immanuel di Romi, commonly called Immanuel ben Shelomoh, and reference will also be made to his literary and friendly relationship to Dante Alighieri, the famous author of the *Divina Commedia*. It ought, however, to be stated at the outset that although Immanuel was the composer of several Italian sonnets, he owes his fame as a writer of charming verses and novelettes chiefly to his principal Hebrew work, called *Machberoth*. The latter, apart from its literary value as a most interesting and entertaining book, is at the same time the chief source from which information has been obtained about its author's biography. But, as such, the volume is not always quite trustworthy, as certain facts mentioned there have hitherto not been fully authenticated, and would indeed seem to be more fictitious than true. Modern Jewish and Christian writers, however, among whom Graetz and Güdemann may especially be mentioned, have most ably utilized the old and new material at hand, and, thanks to their fruitful labours, a more complete and trustworthy sketch of the life and works of the object of this essay can now be drawn.

According to Graetz's ingenious combination of dates and circumstances, (comp. Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, B. vii. Anmerk. 3), it would seem that Immanuel was born in the year 1265, which is, by a remarkable coincidence, the same year as that of Dante's birth. Immanuel's parents, Solomon and Justa by name, belonged to a renowned Jewish family, called Ziphroni, and occupied a most honourable

position in the Jewish community of Rome. They bestowed great care on their son's early education, and engaged most efficient teachers to superintend his studies in Hebrew and in secular subjects. One of his earliest teachers was Benjamin ben Yechiel, a clever physician and a great Hebrew scholar, who made him acquainted with the works of Maimonides. Later on, he was taught by a relative of his, Leone Romano by name, who held the post of Hebrew instructor to Robert, King of Naples, and was also the translator of the works of Albertus Magnus and of Thomas Aquinas. Another teacher of his was Judah Siciliano, author of several pretty Italian poems, who cultivated in his pupil's mind a taste for poetry and *belles lettres*. Through these teachers, who were all received on terms of equality in the best Christian society at Rome, Immanuel often came into contact with the members of a secret literary and political society, called "Young Italy." These members were all young men of education and talent, and their object was to propagate liberal ideas among their less enlightened countrymen, and to induce them to shake off the yoke of the dominant church, by which they were just then most heavily pressed. Dante, during his stay at Rome, used to attend the meetings of the society in question, and there young Immanuel seems to have first entered on a friendly relationship with the great Italian bard, by whose genius and amiable personality he was powerfully attracted. In fact, he had so many points in common with Dante, that one would be inclined to believe that he took him for his model. Fate, too, has so moulded part of their life and their ultimate death, that some resemblance between their careers is at once recognisable. Both Dante and Immanuel, who while in the prime of life had occupied a most prominent position in society, were obliged at an advanced age to go as poor wanderers into exile, and both died and were buried far from their native place. From a literary point of view, they also resembled each other, but of this more will be said later

on. I shall also have to refer to some recent publications, which tend to prove that Dante, on his part, also entertained friendly feelings towards Immanuel. The following two lines that occur in *Parad.* (verses 80 and 81), show that their author must have been favourably disposed to the race from which Immanuel had sprung. They run thus :—

“Uomini siate, e non peccora matte,

“Si ch'il giudeo voi di voi non rida.”

(Act ye as men, and not as stupid cattle,

Lest the Jew in your midst will scorn you.)

It is not known whether Immanuel ever underwent any special training to obtain the qualification to practise as a physician. At any rate there is no doubt that he was actively engaged for a number of years in his native town as a medical practitioner, and that in that capacity he enjoyed general confidence and respect. On reaching manhood, he married the daughter of Rabbi Samuel, President of the Jewish community of Rome, whose functions seem to have been religious as well as secular. That conjugal union was a most happy one, and husband and wife remained strongly attached to each other in life-long affection. Immanuel considered his wife a model of womanhood, as one who, notwithstanding her great beauty and personal attractions, was extremely modest and unassuming, and he sang her praises on most occasions on which he referred to the fair sex. With the exception of the untimely death of their only son Moses, which naturally caused Immanuel and his wife intense sorrow, nothing occurred during the greater part of their married life that could have seriously interfered with their happiness and contentment. In his leisure hours, Immanuel continued to enlarge his acquaintance with books treating of grammar, exegesis, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, philosophy and Kabbala, and acquired at the same time some knowledge of Latin, Greek, and Arabic. Occasionally he wrote essays of varying length on

some of the subjects named above, but his most favourite occupation was the composition of verses either in his native tongue or in Hebrew. In the latter language he especially excelled when he wrote rhymed-prose (מליצה), although his other poetical pieces are also pretty and attractive. In the year 1315, when Immanuel was just fifty years old, he succeeded to the office of his father-in-law after the latter had been assassinated by a band of robbers whilst travelling in the country. In his new position as the spiritual head of the Jewish community of Rome, he enjoyed a continuance of his popularity, and his kindness of heart, and his great literary attainments procured for him a vast number of admirers and friends. Nay, his fame as a scholar and a writer of rhymed-prose and poetry spread even as far as France and Spain, where his Hebrew compositions were eagerly read and greatly appreciated.

But suddenly some unlucky event happened in Immanuel's life which changed his previous happiness and prosperity into misery and indigence. The same man upon whom fortune had hitherto bestowed her most gracious smiles, was obliged at a very short notice to break up his comfortable home, and, somewhat like his friend Dante, to go out into the world as an exile and fugitive, in search of a scanty livelihood, and of a night's lodging. The real cause that produced this unexpected catastrophe has as yet not been clearly explained. According to Immanuel's own version of the matter, he had been security for some pretended friends of his, and the latter failing to redeem their obligations, he himself was obliged to satisfy the demands of the creditors. Being thus reduced to the utmost poverty, and no longer able to maintain his previous independent position in the community, he emigrated and turned his back for ever on the scene of his unmerited misfortune. This explanation, however plausible it may appear, does not throw any light on the mystery that still remains in respect to Immanuel's forced resignation of

the post he held in the Jewish community of Rome. But, it would seem that there were among his flock several fanatics, who may have nourished in their mind a secret hatred against the author of erotic poems and of other compositions in which certain religious rites and customs of the Jews were lightly spoken of. Now, so long as he had ample means at his disposal, and was independent of the community, these fanatics dared not attack him publicly. They took, however, advantage of his monetary embarrassment to denounce him as an unbeliever and heretic, who, in their opinion, was unfit to occupy with decency the important post he held, and they ultimately succeeded in bringing about the deposition of Immanuel.

But, whatever the explanation, the fact remains undisputed that Immanuel left Rome as a prematurely aged and broken-hearted man, and that he wandered about for some time with his wife from place to place until he arrived in Fermo, a town situated in the district of Ancona. There, a wealthy and liberal-minded man, Benjamin by name, who happened to be a great admirer of Immanuel's poems, took him and his wife into his house, and provided for their wants. But this happiness did not last long, for after a while Immanuel experienced some new troubles which again turned the current of his life into a straitened channel. In the year 1321, death removed from his side his dearly beloved wife, the faithful partner of his joys and sorrows, and about the same time died Dante, his model and friend. Bosone da Gabbio, a renowned lawyer in his time and a common friend of Dante and Immanuel, on learning the melancholy facts just narrated, sent to the latter the following lines as a token of his deep sympathy and grief:—

BOSONE TO THE JEW MANOELLO AFTER DANTE'S DEATH.

Two lamps of life have just waxed dim and died,
Two souls for virtue loved and comely grace ;
Thou, friend, must smile no more with fair bright face,
But weep for him, sweet song's and learning's pride.

And weep for her, thy wife, torn from thy side
In all her beauty and her loveliness,
Whom thou hast sung so oft ere thy distress,
That is mine, too, and with me doth abide.

Not I alone bewail thy hapless lot,
But others too : do thou bewail thine own
And then the grief that all of us have got,
In this the direst year we e'er have known :
Yet Dante's soul, that erst to us was given,
Now ta'en from earth, doth glisten bright in heaven.

MANOELLO'S ANSWER.

The floods of tears well from my deepest heart :
Can they e'er quench my grief's mad burning flame ?
I weep no more, my sorrow is the same ;
And hope instead that death may soothe the smart.
Then Jew and Christian weep, and sit with me
On mourning-stool : for sin hath followed woe ;
I prayed to God to spare this misery,
And now no more my trust in him I show.

When Immanuel's time of mourning was over, his benevolent host suggested that the poet should collect and revise his various Hebrew compositions, with the view of thereby making them accessible to future readers. Immanuel very gladly accepted this proposal, partly because he wished to perpetuate in his poems the memory of his beloved wife and that of his friend Dante, and partly because he thought that such a genial literary activity would be a pleasant occupation for his declining years. Thus he set to work, and in due course accomplished his task to his own great satisfaction. A few years later, in 1330, when Immanuel was sixty-five years old, he died peacefully in the house of his host. One of his friends, the already mentioned Bosone, received a few poetical lines referring to Immanuel's death, which were composed and sent to him by Cino da Pistoja, a noted lawyer and a poet of some renown in his time. These lines are in so far interesting as they contain an unmistakable reference to the friendly

relationship that existed between Dante and Immanuel. They run as follows :—

CINO TO BOSONE AFTER THE DEATH OF DANTE AND OF
THE JEW MANOEL.

Bosone, your friend Manoello is dead,
Still keeping fast to his false idle creed ;
Methinks to the regions of hell he is sped
Where no unbeliever from anguish is freed.
Yet not 'mongst the vulgar his soul doth abide,
But Dante and he still remain side by side.

BOSONE'S ANSWER.

Manoel, whom thou hast thus consigned
Unto the dark domains of endless night,
Has not within those regions been confined,
Where Lucifer holds sway with awful might.
Lucifer, who once 'gainst Heaven's lord,
In lust for empire drew rebellious sword.
And though he in that loathly prison pine,
Where thou hast brought him though he willed it not ;
What fool will trust this idle tale of thine,
That he and Dante should be thus forgot ;
Well let them for a time endure their fate,
God's mercy will be theirs or soon or late !

As I have already stated, Immanuel wrote several books treating of various subjects, such as Hebrew grammar, exegesis and Kabbala, and composed, in addition to several commentaries on various parts of the Bible, a collection of Hebrew novelettes and poems. But while his *Eben Bochan* and *Migdal Oz*, which two books exist only as manuscripts, and treat respectively of Hebrew grammar and Kabbala, would, at the present day, hardly be considered to have any literary or scientific value, his commentaries on the Bible and more especially that on Proverbs (published at Naples in 1487) deserve some attention. The latter is particularly interesting, inasmuch as it throws occasional light on the author's views with reference to the study of secular subjects by his Italian co-religionists, and makes us at the same time acquainted with the general

spirit and tendency that prevailed at that period. The following example will give an idea of Immanuel's method when commenting on a passage that seemed to him to offer an opportunity of adding a thought of his own. Thus, in the commentary on the Book of Proverbs (xxvi. 13). Immanuel explains the passage, "The slothful (man) saith, There is a lion in the way; a lion in the street," as follows:—

This passage refers specially to those persons who are too slow in the acquirement of knowledge and learning, which they consider as dangerous as the meeting of a fierce lion in the street. They say, How should we apply ourselves to the study of general science, since among its most prominent devotees there are so many sceptics and unbelievers; or how should we be expected to study logic, as it is a subject that infatuates the student, and leads him to erroneous conclusions? As to philosophy (they say) we must shun it altogether, since it owes its existence to Aristotle, who, like the rest of the ancient philosophers, did not believe in the divine origin of our Law. But these fools (Immanuel continues) forget that we must accept truth from whatever quarter it may come. Moreover, every kind of science which those fools and sluggards describe as "foreign" (חיצוניים) belonged originally to the Jewish people, and was first taught in our own sacred tongue. Unfortunately, those very books that contain those scientific teachings, were lost during our perilous wanderings through the world. Of King Solomon's numerous poetical and scientific works we only possess three. It is more than a mere legend that kings and learned men of various nations and countries expressly came to the latter with the view of being instructed by him in those subjects, and that they subsequently committed to writing the result of their scientific inquiries. These teachings are still in the possession of other nations, while we, ourselves, lost them during our wanderings about from place to place, and it is even a wonder that the twenty-four volumes of Holy Writ have been preserved by us up to the present day. It is therefore most probable that natural science, metaphysics and philosophy, were originally taught by Solomon, although their origin is now-a-days ascribed to Plato and Aristotle. With regard to the excellent art of music, it is well known that it originated in our religion, and has found great votaries in men like Assaph and Samuel; but in our own time it is exclusively practised by Christians, while the Jews have very little knowledge of it. As for logic, it certainly does *not* lead the student astray, but on the contrary it rather cultivates his mind, and prepares him at the same

time for the study of other sciences. Therefore, whoever calls logic a "foreign" science, or speaks contemptuously of Plato and Aristotle, because they did not belong to the Jewish nation, is like the sluggard who exclaims: "A lion is in the way."

The extract just quoted as a specimen of the contents of Immanuel's commentaries on various parts of the Bible shows that there is nothing particularly noteworthy in the author's exposition of the text, the interest being in his interpolated digressions. He owes his fame to his collection of Hebrew novelettes and poems, called *Machberoth*. The volume stands unrivalled in the whole domain of Hebrew literature, and will always occupy a prominent position among Hebrew works of the same *genre*. It consists of twenty-eight chapters, in almost all of which the so-called Makámát form is prevalent, that is to say, they consist of rhymed prose interspersed with long or short poems. Some of the latter are composed in the melodious form introduced by the Italian poet Fra Guittone di Arezzo (about 1259), the principal characteristics of which are *rima chiusa* and *rima alternata*. But, although Immanuel's Hebrew poetry is mostly sweet and attractive, it is far excelled in regard to style and expression by his rhymed prose. The principal charm of Hebrew rhymed prose lies in the application or distortion of short sentences or phrases of the Bible to the description of profane objects or actions. This mode of writing was first used by certain Arabian poets, who treated the text of the Koran in the manner indicated, and they subsequently found several imitators among Hebrew writers, especially among those belonging to the so-called Spanish school. In fact, according to Rabbi Moses ben Chabib (about 1486), the writing of rhymed prose in Hebrew was in his time a universally approved rhetorical device. But there was a vast difference between Immanuel and the other writers who were in the habit of using a similar style. While the latter, as a rule, tried to preserve a spirit of reverence towards the Hebrew text of the Bible, Immanuel did not put any restraint on his pen. Not

seldom he sacrificed even good taste and decency to the effect of the moment, and many a Biblical phrase, which is on the surface neither funny nor mirth-provoking, is twisted by him into a pun, or a satirical remark of a coarse and objectionable character. The most favourite subjects of Immanuel's muse were Love, Wine, and Song, and he was not less fond of occasionally mocking at sacred things. Even the sight of an old church-yard filled with a heap of half-broken and tumbled-down tombstones could not put a stop to his buffoonery. This seems to have become his second nature, and he goes even so far that, having once begun to scoff at the follies and shortcomings of other people, he makes merry over his own vanities and presumption. In that sense the extraordinary self-applause must be taken which dots the pages of the *Machberoth*. These expressions may also be regarded as satires on the superabundant praises which some of his literary contemporaries used to bestow upon their own works. That Immanuel's self-praise should be regarded as serious, seems scarcely compatible with the frequent eulogies of others with which his book abounds.

It would be at once vain and superfluous to offer an apology for the frivolities and the uncouth wit which are such striking characteristics of the *Machberoth*. Immanuel, although a Hebrew by descent and training, though he was eminently proficient in Jewish lore and tradition, was at the same time thoroughly imbued with the spirit of the Italian nation and literature. The character of this literature will be recognised from the fact that the principal representative of the Italian novelists belonging to the period was Boccaccio, the author of that collection of humorous but licentious tales, the *Decameron*. This book since its first appearance had ever enjoyed a great popularity, although at one time it was condemned by some of the highest dignitaries of the Catholic Church. Now Immanuel, adopting the style of the Italian novelists of his time whose works were great favourites with the

general reading public, no doubt thought he would attract and amuse Jewish readers by reproducing in a Hebrew garb the popular ideas and modes of expression. Immanuel attained no mean measure of success. He was placed at a disadvantage from which his Italian rivals were free. For, while they had the whole world as a sphere of observation, and as material on which to work, Immanuel had to content himself with using for the objects of his satire persons and things known only to a comparatively narrow circle of his own acquaintances and friends. Thus he mostly ridiculed the vanities and follies of certain Jewish men and women of his surroundings, or he mocked at the petty quarrels between a husband and wife, and made merry over the jealousies of conceited would-be literary men belonging to the Jewish community of Rome, who were otherwise unknown and obscure. But, notwithstanding all these drawbacks, the *Machberoth* have a lasting charm and attractiveness. They have always found a great number of readers, although Moses de Rieto (died about 1500), author of a short history of Hebrew literature called *מקדש מעט*, spoke contemptuously of Immanuel's works, and their perusal was interdicted a century later by Joseph Caro, the compiler of the well-known code, the *Shulchan Aruch*. The best proof of their great popularity lies in the fact that they have gone through several editions, the first produced at Brescia, Italy, in the year 1492, and the last at Lemberg in 1870. In recent years parts of them have been translated into German by Steinschneider, Stern, Geiger, Fürst, and others.

As regards the title of the book and the arrangement of its parts, the following brief remarks will give the necessary information. The word "machberoth," or as some people would read it, "mechabroth," is the plural of the singular noun "machbereth," formed of the radix *חבר*, which originally means to "join or put together," so that in the present sense the noun signifies "collections." Immanuel purposely used the plural form as the title of his book to

prevent it from being confounded with a similar work composed by Alcharizi, which is entitled *Machbereth Ithiel*, where the same term appears in the singular. Immanuel's work consists of twenty-eight chapters of varying lengths, which seem to have been written at different times, and to have then been loosely put together. Only the second, third, and the last three chapters of the book bear a superscription to indicate the subject they treat of, while the rest are without any heading whatever. A good number of these chapters were composed by the author when he was still comparatively young, and life was as yet for him full of charm and of sweet diversions. His muse was then inspired with sentiments similar to those which animated Horace when he sang:—

Quid sit futurum cras fuge querere, et
Quem Fors dierum cunque dabit lucro
Appone.

His life's philosophy, too, was then of the same pattern as that of Amphis, who embodies it in the following often-quoted line:—

Πῶτε, παῖζε. θνήσκει ὁ βίος. ὀλιγὸς οὐπὶ γῆ χρόνος.

On the other hand, there is no doubt that the greater part of the *Machberoth* must belong to a later period in the author's life, when he had already experienced some of the caprices of fortune, and when various trials and troubles had darkened the serenity of his mind and temper. But even then his soul was not entirely overcast, and he often smiled amidst tears. It ought, moreover, to be remembered that injustice would be done to Immanuel if his private life and character were judged in the light of his writings. In these he certainly appears as a thorough devotee of women and of Bacchus, and as a scoffer at religion and religious practices; but in his actual conduct he showed none of these characteristics. One would rather feel inclined to think that the *Machberoth* were intended to serve as a mirror, in which the culpable habits of a certain class

of his Jewish contemporaries were reflected. And it is for this very reason that the book under notice has more than a mere literary value. Apart from its usefulness as an entertaining collection of short novels, it furnishes the reader with a description of the moral and social condition of an important section of the Italian Jews during part of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and has been utilised by our modern Jewish historians for this purpose.¹ Thus, for instance, we gather from some passages occurring in the *Machberoth* (chap. 1) that the Jewish community of Rome was at that period in flourishing circumstances, that many of its members lived in large and magnificently-furnished houses, and that some of them also possessed mansions and estates in the country. Further, we are told (*ibid.* chap. 23) that general science, philosophy, and poetry were assiduously studied and appreciated by the Jews of Rome, and that men of great culture and learning belonging to their race were held by them in high estimation. How eager Jewish young men in Italy were in those days to increase their knowledge of books may be seen from the following little incident related in the *Machberoth* (chap. 8). A Jewish bookseller travelling from Spain to Rome left at Perugia one of his boxes containing various books, the titles of which were given in a list that was also left behind. Immanuel and his young friends were so anxious to read the contents of those literary treasures that, in the absence of their owner, they broke the box open and read the books it contained with the greatest delight. When on his return the bookseller learnt, to his great dismay, what had happened, Immanuel appeased his wrath by the witty remark, "That the Prophet Moses on his once breaking the two tablets of the Covenant not only did not arouse God's anger, but was even praised for the act."

As regards the Jewish women in Italy of that period, Immanuel does not always draw a flattering picture of

¹ See Graetz, *Geschichte*, vol. vii., and Gûdemann.

them and their social habits. They, or rather those belonging to the best and most educated families, mixed freely with men; and being exceedingly fond of beautiful and costly dresses, the unmarried among them preferred rich suitors to more amiable ones who were less endowed with worldly goods. A great many Jewish ladies, however, were, in accordance with the author's own testimony, modest and simple in their tastes; and if he satirises in the *Machberoth* the luxurious habits of Jewish women and their laxity in good manners, it is not necessary to suppose that they were the more numerous class.

To convey to English readers some idea of the contents of the *Machberoth*, a few extracts from it will be quoted here in an English translation. The latter, however, must not be expected to reproduce the charm and the sparkle of the original Hebrew, which are peculiar to that language. It must also be stated, in passing, that the humour which is so characteristic of the *Machberoth* will only be fully seen and duly appreciated by those who are well versed in the Hebrew text of the Bible; and have, at the same time, a fair knowledge of the Rabbinical style of writing.

After a short prologue, in which Immanuel speaks briefly of the tendency of the *Machberoth* and of the reason which induced him to publish them, the author addresses his muse in lines, of which the following occur towards the conclusion:—

O, let thy teachings softly flow like heaven's dew,
That they inspire mankind with what is good and true;
Let the name "Immanuel" a potent watchword be,
Ever to make all men in soul and body free.

The first chapter of the *Machberoth* was apparently written at a late period of the author's life, when he was wandering about as an exile, having no settled home and no means of subsistence. He speaks with biting sarcasm of his open and secret enemies, who were the direct cause of his ruin and misery; but he consoles himself with the thought that he is their superior in respect to culture and

education. He also expresses his gratification at having in his reduced circumstances at least a wife and comforter that excelled the wives of his adversaries in virtue and beauty, and who could serve to all women as a model for imitation. In reference to the latter he lays down the following peculiar maxim :—

The virtuous women are seldom the bright-eyed and fair,
But wrinkled old crones with silver-white hair.

The author is now in his proper element, and pretending to stand with a friend of his on the public promenade where the ladies of the town are walking to and fro, he singles out two of them. The one, called *Tamar*, he describes as a model of perfect beauty; and the other, *Beriah* by name, he designates as the personification of womanly ugliness. The merits of the one, and the demerits of the other, are described by Immanuel in the following manner :—

Tamar looketh up, like the stars shine her eyes,
Beriah appears, and even Satan quickly flies.
Tamar's form divine excites angels' desire,
Beriah e'en crows with dismay might inspire.
Tamar, like the sun, makes all round appear gay,
Beriah were an omen if seen on New Year's Day.
Tamar is most lovely and fair to distraction,
Beriah deprives men of love's great attraction.
Tamar, bright as the moon, is yet e'er full of light,
Beriah might be queen 'mongst the fiends of night.
Tamar, would that I were a flower, tender and sweet.
To be trampled to earth by thy pretty feet.
Beriah, 'tis from fear of beholding thy face
That Messiah postpones showing his grace.
Tamar is enchanting, delighting the eyes,
Beriah a nightmare in woman's disguise.

Some beautiful lyrics devoted to the same subject, which is very much favoured by the author, are to be found in the 16th chapter of the *Machberoth*, two of which, under the respective headings "Thine Eyes" and "Paradise and Hell," run as follows :—

THINE EYES.

Thine eyes are as bright, O thou sweetest gazelle,
As the glittering rays of the sun's golden spell,
And thy face glows as fair in the light of the day
As the red blushing sky when the morning is gay.

Thy tresses of gold are as neatly bedight
As though they were wrought by enchantment's kind might ;
Thou openest thy lips in a smile or a sigh,
And thy pearly teeth gleam like the stars in the sky.

Ah, shall I praise the bright charm of thine eyes
That move every heart, that win all by surprise ?
For peerless thy charms, and unequalled thy birth ;
Thou art of heaven, all others of earth.

PARADISE AND HELL.

At times in my spirit I fitfully ponder
Where shall I pass after death from this light,
Do heaven's bright glories await me, I wonder,
Or Lucifer's kingdom of darkness and night ?

In the one, though perhaps 'tis of ill reputation,
A crowd of gay damsels will sit by my side ;
But in heaven there's boredom, to my expectation,
To hoary old men and old crones I'll be tied.

And so I will shun the abodes of the holy,
And fly from the sky, which is dull, so I deem :
Let hell be my dwelling ; there's no melancholy
Where love reigns for ever and ever supreme.

There are several short novelettes in the *Machberoth* based on various *piquant* incidents, but the two following are perhaps most suitable for quotation. In themselves they are slight enough, but they become a ready outlet to the author's satire. In one of them (chapter 14) a clever trick is described of a man who may be termed a legacy-hunter, by means of which he succeeded in illegally obtaining a large gift from the appointed trustees. A wealthy Jewish gentleman living in Rome had a quarrelsome woman for a wife, and a spendthrift and fool for a son, both of whom made his life most miserable. One day, the wretched husband and father abruptly left his native

town which he changed for another situated in Greece, and having taken all his movable property with him, he lived at his new abode for a number of years in peace and contentment. Shortly before his death he had his will drawn up, in which he left all his earthly possessions to his prodigal son, whom he expected to have meanwhile improved his evil ways. As executors of his will he nominated some elders of the Jewish community of the town he then lived in, charging them at the same time with the commission after his death to invite his son in Rome to come and take possession of the legacy bequeathed to him. He naturally expected that they would not hand over the latter to any one who had not previously satisfied them that he was the rightful heir. When in due course the father died, and the intelligence of his death and testament was made known in Rome, the prodigal son was so little affected by it that he postponed taking any steps to have the will executed. He waited for several months, during which interval a man of evil repute took advantage of the son's delay, and being a master of the art of simulation he deceived the executors, who handed him over the amount of the legacy without concerning themselves about very closely examining his credentials. His assumed melancholy, the copious tears he shed on the grave of his supposed father, and his pretended reluctance to use the moneys of the legacy for his own benefit, convinced the executors of the will that he was the right man. When a little later the rightful son and heir appeared on the scene, and, without showing any sign of grief or mourning, asked for his father's legacy, he was laughed to scorn, and had to leave the place empty-handed, in spite of his possessing genuine credentials testifying his claim to the legacy.

In the second novelette (chapter 23), an incident is related that occurred to the author in the course of his practice as a physician. He was once called to a patient, who suffered temporarily from indigestion, and who

happened to belong to that class of people who fancy themselves endowed with great poetical talents. Immanuel prescribed his patient some medicine, and advised him at the same time to remain in bed till the following morning, when he hoped to see him again, and to find him completely recovered. But the patient seems to have felt on that particular night some poetical inspiration, and, disregarding his medical adviser's orders, got out of bed and composed a long poem. This he showed to Immanuel with great glee on the following morning, telling him at the same time by way of reproach that the prescribed medicine was quite useless, and had produced no effect upon him. "Pardon me, my friend," said Immanuel, "my medicine has, indeed, had some effect upon you: it has removed from your brains a fair quantity of poetical rubbish."

Wit of another character is shown in Immanuel's exegetical dialogue (chapter 11) in which he explains some Biblical passages and phrases that had been misunderstood by various ignorant persons who had come to ask him for his opinion. The following question and answer will serve as a specimen of the whole. A man, apparently not well versed in Biblical lore, asked the author quite seriously, how it was that, having always been told that the "Law" had been given on Mount Sinai, in another passage, occurring in the Book of Esther (iii. 15), it is expressly stated that "the Law was given in Shushan" (namely the law that was promulgated by King Ahasuerus to destroy all his Jewish subjects)? But Immanuel was equal to the occasion, and assuming a most serious countenance, he said: "You are quite right, my friend, but you seem to have misunderstood the meaning of the word 'Shushan.' The latter does not refer to the *place*, but to the *time* at which the Law was given. This was in the Shushan-season (= שושן —rose), when the rose is in its full bloom, which is, as everybody knows, in spring time."

On some other occasion Immanuel treats in a most sati-

rical manner a subject of which Horace had already made use—in his first satire, beginning with the words:—“Qui fit, Mæcenâs, ut nemo, quam sibi sortem,” etc. Our author lets several persons come forward, who occupy various positions in life, with which none of them seems to be thoroughly pleased. They want some other vocation in which they hope they may find that happiness and contentment which, they maintain, is denied to them in their own. But on learning that those very persons, whom they had envied for the happiness they apparently enjoyed in their respective callings, suffered from various evils unknown except to their immediate surroundings, the grumblers soon declare with an oath that they would never consent to change from what they are.

Immanuel does not, however, restrict himself to humorous subjects. He shows himself possessed of tender sensibility, and pathetic passages occur often in his pages.

The sight of tombstones and graves, the death of a near relative or friend, or any other painful event of which he becomes aware, puts him at once in a most serious mood. On those occasions, he addresses himself to God in fervent prayer, and pours out his innermost soul in strains that are full of warmth and feeling, and impress the reader by their earnestness and devotion. There are nineteen prayers and hymns to be found in the *Machberoth*, most of which bear the stamp of the author's deep religious sentiments, the one that occurs in chapter 26, beginning with the words, *אלהים נפלו פני בזכרי וכו'*, has been inserted in the so-called Roman *Machsor* (published in the year 1436), which fact proves its effectiveness as a liturgical poem, and shows at the same time that even a century after the author's death his name was honourably remembered by the Jews of Italy.

To that class of serious poetry occurring in the *Machberoth* may be added some long epitaphs (chapter 21), composed by Immanuel with the view of serving as a kind of “In Memoriam” for himself. In the same chapter is

also to be found a funeral oration in rhymed-prose, which the author set down as an exemplar of the one that he expected would be delivered at his bier after his death. But, even when discussing such a serious topic as death and burial, Immanuel cannot abstain from making jokes on himself and the supposed mourners. Why, he asks mockingly, should he himself fare better than, for instance, Noah and Solomon, who had to leave behind respectively a splendid vineyard and a number of beautiful wives? The mourners over him, he thinks, will certainly forget how to laugh after he is no more, but he expects that they will be put again into good humour on reading his posthumous work.

The last and, in some respects perhaps, the most interesting chapter in the *Machberoth* is the one entitled *Ha-Topheth we-ha-Eden*, or "Hell and Paradise." If, after all that has hitherto been said on the subject, there is still any doubt about the existence of a friendly and literary relationship between Dante and Immanuel, the chapter in question as well as the circumstance that brought about its composition tend to remove that doubt altogether. According to comparatively recent investigations (compare Ersch and Gruber's *Real-Encyclopædie*, "Dante"), it would seem that Dante's *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* were not published before the years 1314 and 1318 respectively, for the simple reason that mention is made in them of certain incidents and events that happened during those years. At that time, Immanuel was about fifty years old, and had just begun to wander about from place to place as a prematurely aged and destitute man. Now, considering that in those times, before the invention of printing, a written copy of any important work could only be procured by wealthy people, the question naturally arises, From whom did Immanuel obtain a MS. copy of the *Divina Commedia* that enabled him to compose an imitation of it in Hebrew? This perplexing question can, however, be answered in the following manner. Although Immanuel was not in

possession of a copy of Dante's poem, he had yet some notion of its contents in consequence of having heard it read and recited by the author himself before the members of the political and literary society called "Young Italy," to which reference has already been made. And being a great admirer of Dante and of his muse, he was, no doubt, so deeply impressed by the contents of Dante's work that they remained for a number of years fresh in his memory. That circumstances must have enabled him to write his Hebrew imitation without actually having a written copy before him, of which he would, besides, have made a more extensive use than he in reality did.

As regards the merits and the conception and style of the *Ha-Topheth we-ha-Eden*, it may be said that the latter is quite unique in the whole domain of Hebrew literature. In the introduction to it the author states that, having reached his sixtieth year, the sudden death of a younger friend caused him much fear and anxiety concerning his own future destination, and he wished to know the fate that awaited him beyond the grave. He then invoked the spirit of the Prophet Daniel, with a view of being assisted by it in obtaining his object, and his request was soon granted. He had a vision, and he fancied that a venerable old man appeared to him amidst flashes of lightning and tremendous thunder clashes, and told him that he had come in order to carry out his wish, and to show him his future place in the world of spirits. Yielding to Immanuel's desire to be first conducted to the regions of Hell, the old man led him on in that direction. While going onward they passed through several places which are also mentioned by Dante in his *Inferno*, such as "a valley of corpses," and "the gate of rejection," in front of which "a flaming sword turned in every way." Myriads of souls were then being dragged through the gate by evil spirits to receive their castigations for sins committed by them during their lifetime, and on that gate the words were inscribed: "Here is only an entrance, but no exit." These words remind one of the passage used by

Dante (*Inferno*, iii. 9): "All that enter here, may renounce the hope of coming out again."

Having entered through the gate into Hell, Immanuel sees and describes the various kinds of tortures inflicted upon sinners, among whom are specially mentioned sceptics, gamblers, adulterers, misers, spendthrifts, and hypocrites of every description. A certain class of Jewish preachers and precentors are also put by Immanuel into the infernal regions, because they were in the habit, whilst preaching and reciting prayers, to lift up their eyes to the women's gallery instead of heavenwards. At the mention of these hypocrites, Immanuel seems to have remembered his own failings and shortcomings in the same direction, and he became pale and faint-hearted for fear lest he might have to suffer the same tortures and agonies as his quondam colleagues. But when his conductor noticed his dejection of mind and heart, he comforted him with the assurance that, although he could not pronounce him quite free from blame and sin, yet he hoped that his virtues and his merits as an author of several excellent works would procure for him a seat in Paradise.

Presently, Immanuel and his leader leave Hell and betake themselves to Paradise, at the sight of which the former at once regains his good humour. Looking round about him, he sees the souls of all those Biblical and post-Biblical personages who have in some way or other reflected credit on the Jewish race, either by their literary works or by their valour, honesty, and virtue. He is greeted with great joy and cordiality by Moses, David, and Solomon, who eulogise in high terms of applause the commentaries he had written on their literary productions, which comments they consider excellent in every respect. On leaving that group of Biblical authors, Immanuel notices another at some distance which was surrounded and shone upon by a glorious light that dazzled his own eyes. And asking his leader who those distinguished men were, he was told that they were *the pious of all nations* (חסידי אומות העולם), who, during

their existence on earth had greatly excelled their neighbours in kind-heartedness, virtue, and learning, and were in consequence rewarded with seats of honour in Paradise. Close to that group, Immanuel noticed a magnificent throne being erected, which he was given to understand was destined to be occupied by a friend, or rather a brother of his as he is called, Daniel by name. It is still a matter of uncertainty to which particular friend and brother the author may have referred. But, on reading the whole passage bearing on the subject, one feels impelled to think that he must, as Geiger suggested, have alluded to Dante (Daniel), upon whom he had looked as a friend and brother. Near the throne of this friend, he was told, his own would be erected, so that they might be united again after death and enjoy together heavenly bliss ever after.

The few special passages bearing on this friendship are so characteristic of Immanuel's liberal-mindedness that a reproduction of them here may not be out of place. They run somewhat as follows :—

I do not know what has caused me to think of my friend Daniel, who, as an associate and friend, was to me of inestimable worth. It was he who showed me the path of truth and righteousness, who helped me greatly when fortune had forsaken me, and whose gigantic mind is still spoken of on earth with great esteem and admiration. On my asking my guide where my own throne would be placed after my death, he said : You are certainly by far inferior in greatness and celebrity to your friend, whose name and fame will always be held in great honour by posterity. Yet because you have both lived after the same pattern, and have both striven after truth, you shall be united again after death. Your throne shall be erected near to his, and, sitting hereafter always close to each other, you will be like Joshua, who once was the attendant and disciple of Moses. Having been united in life by a mutual bond of friendly activity, no power shall separate your souls for ever. When I heard this my joy was boundless, for I was most happy in the thought that my lot would be similar to his, and that we shall both have seats in Paradise. And having asked my conductor to let me see the throne destined for my friend, he took me by the hand and led me to a tent where the hand of a master builder had erected a monument wonderful to look at. Angels ran to and fro round about it, women ornamented it with

different sorts of costly textures, and numerous spirits made it glitter with gold, rubies, and sapphires. And soon there stood before my wondering eye a throne formed of ebony, covered with purple and gold, and surmounted by a beautiful glittering crown which shone like the beams of the sun. This, said my companion, is Daniel's throne. You see, my son, the work that he has created in the world is full of fame and renown, and equally great and glorious shall be the throne he is to occupy in the world of spirits.

The *Ha-Topheth we-ha-Eden* closes with a request tendered by Immanuel's conductor that he should write down for the benefit of posterity all that he saw on his wanderings through Hell and Paradise. Thereupon he vanishes amidst the noise of a great storm, which causes the author to awake from his dream.

From what has been said it will be seen that a marked mental affinity existed between Dante and Immanuel, and that the latter was not an unworthy friend and associate of the great Florentine bard. Both used history, scholasticism and romanticism as materials for their respective literary productions. So, too, they were both influenced and carried away by the new national spirit that had inspired the members of "Young Italy" with new ideas and sentiments which were tending to liberate their countrymen—bodily and mentally—from the yoke of superstition and priestcraft. And, finally, it will be admitted that the *Ha-Topheth we-ha-Eden* has, as regards style, dramatic effect, graphic description of persons and places, much in common with the *Divina Commedia*, although the condensed imitation is, of course, vastly inferior to the original. Yet there are several striking points in the *Ha-Topheth we-ha-Eden* which are original to Immanuel. The principal and most remarkable one is this: While the genial, free-thinking Dante is narrow-minded enough to exclude from Paradise, and to send to Hell, all and everyone who does not profess Christianity, including even his leader, Virgil, the Jew Immanuel assigns in Paradise places of honour to the good and righteous of all nations and of all ages, provided they did not deny the existence of God, and of a divine spirit in man.

A Christian *savant*, Professor Th. Paur by name, one of the greatest living authorities on Dante, refers to that particular point in the *Jahrbuch der deutschen Dantegesellschaft*, III. 447, and writes as follows:—"If we closely examine the sentiments put forth in this little poetical volume (*Ha-Topheth we-ha-Eden*), we must confess that the Jew Immanuel need not blush in presence of the Christian Dante. It is true that he, like Dante, condemns those philosophical theories in which the personality of God, the creation of the world by his power, and the existence of a divine spirit in man are denied. But Immanuel shows more courage than Dante by effectively stigmatising hypocrisy in all its various shapes and forms. He also possesses a greater spirit of tolerance than the latter had shown towards men professing creeds different from his own—a beautiful human *näiveté* in matters of religion—which must be sought after with the lantern of Diogenes among the Christians of that period."

In the introduction to this essay mention was made of some few sonnets composed by Immanuel in the Italian language, which tend to prove that he must have been well versed in the literature of his native country. Three of them were some years ago published for the first time in a book entitled: *Letteratura e filosofia, opuscoli per Pasquale Garofalo, Duca di Bonita* (Naples, 1872). As the existence of these few poems was unknown till recent years, it is not unlikely that some other similar poems may also be brought to light quite unexpectedly in the future. Perhaps it will not be out of place to quote here at least one of those sonnets, in order to give the reader an idea of the style and contents of Immanuel's poetical compositions in the Italian language. The one which I select has no heading whatever, but was apparently written in praise and glorification of the author's most favourite subject: Love. Its English translation is somewhat as follows:—

Love has never read the *Ave Maria*. It knows no law, no creed, neither does it hear nor see: it is boundless. Love is an unrestricted

omnipotent power, which insists on obtaining what it craves for. Love does not suffer itself to be deprived of its pride and power by a *Puternoster*, or by any other charm, neither is it afraid of carrying into effect what it is fond of. Amor alone knows what causes me grief ; whatever I may offer him as an excuse he meets me always with the same answer : It is my will and wish.

Before taking leave of Immanuel and his *Machberoth*, the following remark may not be superfluous. Graetz calls the former the Heine of the Middle Ages, and no one will deny that these Jewish poetical geniuses had really in many respects a great resemblance to each other. At all events their lives and writings, as well as the lives and works of several other Jewish literati belonging to various ages and countries, bear ample testimony to the fact, that Jews have always been capable of assimilating themselves to the literary and national spirit of the peoples among whom their lot was cast. So it has been in the past, and there is no reason to doubt that the same fact will be noticeable in an even higher degree in the future.

J. CHOTZNER.
